

## NEWS AND NOTES

Observations on the Status of the Giant Armadillo,  
*Priodontes giganteus*, in Paraguay

DURING MARCH AND APRIL of 1972 while under a grant from the American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia) investigating the Pichiy armadillo, *Zaedyus pichiy caurinus*, and the La Plata three-banded armadillo, *Tolypeutes matacus*, of northern Argentina and Paraguay, certain facts regarding the status of the giant armadillo, *Priodontes giganteus*, came to light.

Two adult armadillos had been exhibited in the Cordoba, Argentina, Zoological Gardens during the previous two years. Both animals came from the province of Salta, Argentina, and both exhibited gunshot wounds on arrival. Neither animal lived longer than several weeks and both expired from septicemia as a result of their wounds, despite intensive therapy (Dr. Carlos A. Rickard, pers. comm.). This species is irregularly available from the Province of Salta where it is reported to be uncommon.

During 1971 and 1972, at least four giant armadillos were captured in Paraguay (H. Stellfeld, pers. comm.; and C. Mulkey and J. Mulkey, pers. comm.). Of these, one adult male was eventually exported to a European Zoo from Asuncion, where it later died. Two animals, one male and one female, were captured and eaten by the Moro Indians in the area of Mariscal Estigarribia. One animal, a male, was captured by local people near the Bolivian border and was also eaten.

Throughout its range in Paraguay, the giant armadillo is nowhere common and there do not appear to be any population centers. The range appears to be broken and discontinuous. Within its range, the armadillo is a favored food item and a valuable source of protein for the various inhabitants (D. A. Meritt, Jr., unpublished observations). From all reports, the armadillo appears solitary and no observers had seen more than one animal at any one time.

There is at present no law protecting this species in Paraguay and there are no immediate plans to implement such legislation. A health certificate from the Departamento de Accion y Control Pecuario of the Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganaderia is the only necessary document for legal ex-

port of this species from Paraguay. During this so-called breeding season of November to April, all mammal export permits are prohibited, but the issuing of the health papers needed for export occurs.

Although animal dealers in Asuncion are aware of the potential value of this animal for export, few reach this animal export center. The animal is much more valuable to the local people as food than as a live export item. There are also difficulties in containing this live animal in existing animal facilities because of its strength and talents for escape.

The status of this species in Paraguay is almost certainly critical. There is a sparsity of information regarding its natural history and reproductive biology, and there are no current field studies of the species in progress.

These observations were obtained through personal interviews and discussions as well as actual field work while in Paraguay.

Within the near future we are hopeful of conducting an indepth study of the giant armadillo to gain insight into the life style of this unique mammal. Currently, a young adult male is under observation and study at the Lincoln Park Zoological Gardens, Chicago, Illinois, and continues to do well.

DENNIS A. MERITT, JR., Lincoln Park Zoological Gardens, Chicago, Illinois 60614

<sup>1</sup>This work supported in part by a grant from the Johnson Fund of the American Philosophical Society.